

VZCZCXRO4043

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHZN

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DE RUEHSK #0008/01 0031602

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 031602Z JAN 08

FM AMEMBASSY MINSK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6783

INFO RUEHDL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0375

RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE 1782

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000008

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV ECON PINR BO

SUBJECT: BELARUSIANS' FEAR OVER ECONOMY GROWS

REF: A. 07 Minsk 846

1B. 07 Minsk 1012

Summary

11. (SBU) According to independent nationwide polling data from December 2007, public opinion on the state of the Belarusian economy has become decidedly pessimistic. Eighty-five per cent of respondents identified price hikes as one of the most serious problems facing the country, while the portion of respondents who said their family's economic position worsened in the past three months doubled. In other significant changes, Aleksandr Lukashenko's popularity continued a slow, steady decline, while attitudes toward the EU improved. End summary.

Price Increases on the Minds of Average Belarusians

12. (SBU) Minsk's Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) conducted its most recent nationwide public opinion poll in December 2007, with a sample size of roughly 1500 respondents and a margin of error of three percentage points. While in previous IISEPS surveys public opinion of the Belarusian economy had been rather static (ref A), the most recent polls showed increased uneasiness. When asked what the most serious problems were facing Belarus and its people, 84.2 per cent identified price hikes, more than twice as many as identified the second most popular response, unemployment (38.3 per cent).

13. (SBU) Respondents also demonstrated growing dissatisfaction with their own economic fortunes. When asked how their own economic situation had changed in the past three months, the proportion of respondents who said their economic situation "got worse" more than doubled since September 2007, while the percentage of respondents who said their economic position improved or remained the same fell by about six and twelve percentage points, respectively.

May '07      September '07      December '07

Improved	14.6	16.6	10.8
Remained Same	66.3	67.1	55.3
Worsened	17.7	15.6	32.4
Don't Know/No	1.4	0.7	1.5

Answer

Lukashenko's Popularity Continues to Slide

14. (SBU) The slow but steady decline of Aleksandr Lukashenko's rating continued apace according to the latest data. When asked,

"If elections for President of Belarus were held tomorrow, for whom would you vote?" Aleksandr Lukashenko's rating fell an additional five per cent since the September '07 survey, roughly eleven percentage points on the year. A slight dip in the support for Aleksandr Milinkevich was statistically insignificant.

May '07      September '07      December '07

<u>A.</u> Lukashenko	48.0	44.9	39.9
<u>A.</u> Milinkevich	12.2	12.3	9.8
<u>A.</u> Kozulin	4.6	3.2	3.7
<u>S.</u> Gaydukevich	1.2	1.3	1.9
<u>S.</u> Sidorskiy			